

Housing Outcry

Advocates blast LI's new federal standing

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The federal government's recent decision to strip Long Island of its own statistical status will be a blow to the region's affordable-housing initiatives, the president of the Long Island Housing Partnership, said yesterday.

Jim Morgo, speaking at the partnership's 15th annual meeting at the Crest Hollow Country Club in Woodbury, said the change would reduce the maximum income that affordable-housing applicants could earn when applying for many assistance programs.

In Nassau and Suffolk counties, applicants' income is typically limited to 80 percent of the region's median income of \$83,675, which amounts to \$66,950 for a family of four. Currently, the median price for an existing single-family home in Suffolk is \$280,000 and \$365,000 in Nassau.

But with Long Island now lumped together with New York City as a metropolitan statistical area, the maximum income would drop between \$15,000 to \$18,000 per family, Morgo said. "This cannot stand," Morgo said.

One of yesterday's speakers, Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, told Morgo and about 450 attendees, "I will work with you aggressively ... to change that [the loss of Long Island's statistical status]." Spitzer joins several other officials, including Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Rep. Steve Israel (D-Huntington) and Matt Crosson, president of the Long Island Association, the region's largest business group, in an effort to persuade federal officials to reverse the ruling.

Spitzer also told attendees at yesterday's meeting his office would help the partnership and other nonprofits in speeding state approval of plans for selling affordable-housing projects.

Typically, the partnership has to submit an offering to the attorney general's office outlining who is eligible to buy, how much each unit will cost and how much profit the buyer would be able to make on eventual resale. While the submission is pending, even though building is allowed to commence, the partnership has not been able to market the development or send out applications.

The partnership will now be able to market the property as well as review applications while the attorney general evaluates its application - potentially speeding occupancy by months, said Peter Elkowitz, executive director at the partnership. That process would have been a boost for the Millennium Hills development on Walt Whitman Road in Melville, he said, where the partnership had to wait for approval and is now reviewing 1,000 applications for 44 available units.

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